

CAN Wycombe Wanderers reach the third round of the F.A. Cup again? That's the question everyone will be asking when Wycombe take on Reading in round two at Loakes Park tomorrow (Saturday).

The club had to wait 90 years to get through to the third round stage, a feat achieved two years ago when they met Middlesbrough, finally losing 1-0 after a replay. Now, incredibly only two seasons later, they have the chance to do it again.

So what are Wanderers' chances of getting through against their Third Division opponents tomorrow?

On paper they would seem to be good. In recent seasons Wanderers have overcome two league clubs in Newport and Bournemouth and put up two marvellous performances against First Division Middlesbrough. And last season, they lost only 1-0 down at Ninian Park to Cardiff City, who later won promotion to Division Two.

Wycombe's cup fighting reputation is feared throughout the Football League and their recent history in the F.A. Cup is the reason for a general air of optimism amongst their followers.

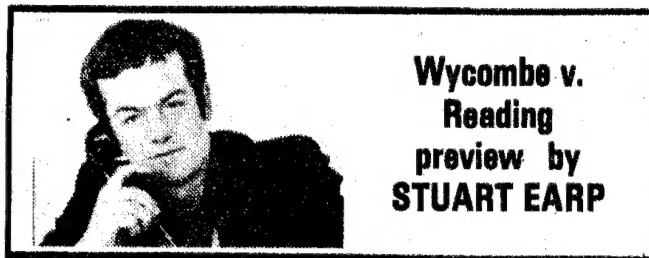
But although the chances of a Wanderers' victory appear to be good, there is little doubt that their task against Reading will prove exceedingly difficult.

Cup opponents no longer make the mistake of under-rating non-league opposition and Reading are no exception.

Some will point to Reading's recent run of poor results in the Third Division which has seen them go five games without victory. In fact, they have only taken three points from their nine matches.

MORE FUEL

More fuel is added to the fire when one considers they struggled to beat Southern League



Wycombe v. Reading preview by STUART EARP

Wealdstone 1-0 in the last round of the cup, and that with Wealdstone reduced to nine men after two of their players had been sent off.

Despite these facts, I still feel Wycombe will have to produce a five-star performance to beat Reading tomorrow.

There's no doubting that Reading have had their problems this season. After winning promotion from Division Four, they began their campaign well, but when the results began to go against them, they slid slowly down the table.

During the summer manager Charlie Hurley made only one signing to supplement the side which finished third in Division Four with 60 points, clinching the second promotion in the club's history. That was his move for Southampton centre-half Paul Bennett, who has proved good value for his £8,000 price tag.

And Bennett's signing was absolutely vital since last season's regular No. 5 Geoff Barker quit the game during the summer. Barker wasn't satisfied with the new contract offered to him, and when he discovered it would not

be improved he quickly found a job as a representative for a building company and moved back to his native Hull.

UNHAPPY

Unfortunately for Reading, Barker was by no means the only player unhappy with the club's wage offer for Division Three.

None of the squad signed a new contract until they had met club chairman Frank Waller to air their grievances. Some extra money was eventually forthcoming — but the good feeling engendered by promotion in the spring was quickly forgotten.

Since that promotion was achieved eight months ago, no fewer than seven of the 16 players concerned have asked for transfers. Four of them — Robin Friday, Steve Hetzke, Tommy Youlden and Dennis Nelson — are now on the list at their own request.

Three more — Steve Death, John Murray and Mick Hollis — have been told they must stay at Elm Park. And Eamonn Dunphy, the players' spokesman in their protracted wage negotiations, was given a free

transfer just six days after signing a new contract.

This suggests unrest amongst the playing staff, but nevertheless, Reading's preparation for tomorrow's game has been thorough. And it includes the use of a sloping pitch near Elm Park in an attempt to acclimatise to the Loakes Park slope.

They are fully aware of the dangers at Wycombe and club officials have been down to Loakes Park on scouting missions several times this season.

READING 4-3-3

Manager Hurley has named the team that was due to play York City last week in Division Three with a change of substitute. He brings in defender Tommy Youlden, recently back after injury, for striker Mick Hollis which suggests his first aim is to insure against defeat. Reading will, however, play 4-3-3.

Hurley's counterpart, Ted Powell, is keeping his cards close to his chest and will not name his side until 2 o'clock tomorrow. It seems likely that the manager will field the side that beat Waterlooville 2-1 in the last round although Ted might make a change in midfield.

Much will depend on the form of Wycombe's front three. The Blues' defence has been magnificent in recent games and should do a good job in containing the Reading forwards. Midfield also seems evenly matched which leaves a great deal on the shoulders of the home strikers.

Manager Powell will have drummed into his players the need to treat Reading with every respect and they know they will have to be on their best form to overcome the opposition. A near capacity crowd will certainly give Wanderers an extra boost although Reading will not be without support as over 3,000 of their fans are expected to make the short journey to Loakes Park.

Spectators are requested to arrive early to avoid a last-minute rush and the turnstiles will be open from 1.30. Those paying through the gate are also requested to have the correct money — prices are 60p adults, 40p children, 30p O.A.P.s. Ticket holders should use the top gate only.

The draw for the third round of the F.A. Cup will be made on Monday at 10.30 am.

REPLAY DATE

SHOULD tomorrow's F.A. Cup tie end in a draw, the replay has been set for Wednesday at Elm Park, Reading, with a 7.30 kick off.

In the event of a draw, stand tickets for the replay will be on sale at Loakes Park on Sunday morning from 10 a.m.-12 noon and on Monday and Tuesday evenings from 7-9 p.m. Stand tickets only will be on sale as spectators will, of course, be able to go through the turnstiles as normal.

Should tomorrow's game be called off due to the weather, the clubs must play the match (at Wycombe) by the following Thursday. A date can be agreed between the two clubs before the Thursday.

Referee

REFEREE for tomorrow's F.A. Cup-tie between Wycombe Wanderers and Reading is Mr John Homewood, a F.I.F.A. official. Mr Homewood was in charge of Wycombe's games against Pistoiese in the Anglo-Italian Tournament last season.

Fixtures

WYCOMBE Wanderers have rearranged two Rothmans Isthmian League matches. Next Saturday (December 18) they are at home to Leytonstone while on Tuesday, December 28, they are at home to Croydon. Both kick offs are at 3 pm.